

Missouri Wary of Granting Clemency to Ray

King's Confessed Killer Still Owes 10 Years on Sentence After Escape

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MEMPHIS, July 26—Even if James Earl Ray is freed from his 99-year sentence in Tennessee for the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., he still faces a prison term in Missouri.

Ray, 69 and dying from liver disease, owes 10 years on a 20-year prison sentence for robbery in Missouri.

Ray's lawyers have asked Tennessee and Missouri for clemency, but Missouri officials said they are unwilling to consider the request at this time, the Commercial Appeal report-

ed today. "In the event that Mr. Ray is returned to our custody, it would be appropriate to request clemency at that time," said Cranston J. Mitchell, administrator of the Missouri Board of Probation and Parole, in a June 23 letter.

Ray escaped from a Missouri prison in 1967, one year before King's assassination.

Tennessee Gov. Don Sundquist (R) has said he has no intention of granting Ray's request for clemency even as Ray seeks a trial he hopes would clear him of the King assassination.

Ray's attorneys acknowledge

clemency is a long shot but are asking that the Tennessee sentence be commuted on grounds that Ray is dying.

He has sought a trial since 1969, when he pleaded guilty to slaying the civil rights leader the previous year. He recanted within days and has tried ever since to take back that plea.

State and federal courts have upheld the guilty plea eight times on appeal.

King's family supports a trial for Ray, arguing it might help answer lingering suspicions that King was the victim of a conspiracy.